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Levy, Samuel D.

Parent and child

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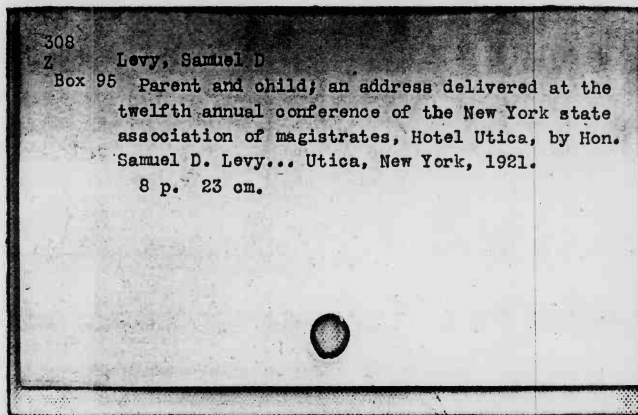
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PARENT AND CHILD

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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE TWELFTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OF THE NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION OF
MAGISTRATES, HOTEL UTICA

By

HON. SAMUEL D. LEVY

Associate Justice, Children's Court of the City of New York

UTICA, NEW YORK

FEBRUARY ELEVENTH, NINETEEN TWENTY-ONE

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PARENT AND CHILD

HON. SAMUEL D. LEVY, JUSTICE, CHILDREN'S COURT, NEW YORK CITY: The subject assigned me is "Parent and Child." There are many avenues of approach to this very large subject. I could have taken the pathological, psychical, political, physiological or biological road, any one of which could have been, doubtlessly, made interesting, but I have chosen the social view of the subject, and I trust in the next twenty minutes I shall indicate the angle from which we judges of the Children's Court view this subject in our daily work.

The child, who should have been wanted before birth and loved ever after, should have a decent, clean home, and live in an atmosphere of love and sympathy with careful and serious parental supervision; it should have intelligent parents, possessed of clean thoughts, religiously inclined, who attend church regularly and send their children there; the child should be sent to school on every school day and not kept home either to help parents, to mind the baby, or to take care of the home, or for any other reason, except personal illness. No mother should go out to work when the father is working and earning a decent living wage, leaving the child or children from morning to night to the mercies of their lax neighbors, or, what is worse still, to paddle their own canoe, for those conditions invariably work out badly. The child should have a parent who will feed it properly, *i. e.*, giving it good, nutritive food, the kind that makes for healthy red blood, bone and muscle. The child should have a parent who is intensely interested in every phase of its life and its development; the child should have its parents supervise its studies, both secular and religious, its play and its work; the child should be neatly and cleanly clothed, warm in winter and cool in summer, during at least its scholastic career; the child should be per-

mitted to join the Boy Scouts or Camp Fire Girls, or other like societies, clubs or organizations, where there are swimming pools and gyms, which make for healthy enjoyment, physical culture and character building, and be encouraged in everything that makes for fine athletic sports and for those things that will hold its interest and permit it to give practical expression to its natural bent, or its outbursts of energy.

The child should have his eyes, ears, nose, teeth, throat, head, heart, lungs and kidneys examined by a physician, say once a year, to ascertain its physical condition, and is entitled to be mentally examined by the board of education, at its entrance and admission to the kindergarten, and semi-annually thereafter during its school career, in order to ascertain its mental and physical progress or retardation, as the case may be, so that if the child be found at any period of its life defective or retarded or feeble-minded, if there is anything ab or subnormal about the child that it may be ascertained at the earliest possible moment, and, if possible, remedied, or at least attended to without delay. (The educational system ought to be compelled by legislation to make, at regular stated intervals, these physical and mental examinations.) The child should have for its companions clean and clean-minded children who attend church, who will neither mislead it nor put it in the way of temptation; the child should live in a decent neighborhood and not in a poor, congested one; the child should have parents that are law abiding, temperate people, who neither quarrel, nor use profane language, nor act immodestly in the presence of the child, but who live happily and harmoniously together.

These and many more things a child should have as a matter of right, and if handicapped by the deprivation of any of them it is robbed of its just right and heritage, and we must not complain if, when any of these essentials have been missing in its youthful life, that the child has gone wrong. Nor need I tell you gentlemen, with your varied experiences as lawyers and magistrates, that if a child is deprived, or never was blessed by the warm rays of parental love and sympathy, or never had proper parental supervision, but, on the contrary, was nagged and badgered from earliest childhood, or had ignorant, indifferent, neglectful, immoral, unmoral, intemperate or otherwise impossible

parents, who permitted the child to grow up like a weed in a neglected garden, or parents who were either unmindful of the interests of their child, paying no attention to its schooling, its companionships, its play or its religious instruction, or gave it improper foods, or permitted it to exist in an underfed condition and suffered it to progress into a state of malnutrition, or in such manner that it became anaemic, nervous or neurotic, or otherwise neglected its physical and mental condition, or paid no attention to its coming or going, or permitted it to roam around the streets with bad companions, or permitted it to live in a poor and congested neighborhood, surrounded by vile neighbors or companions, or the parents themselves quarreled and nagged each other or conducted themselves in an improper or vulgar manner in the presence of the child, *then* because of these omissions or commissions, or any of them, it will inevitably follow that the child will be guilty of anti-social conduct, and is hardly to blame for its outbursts, whatever form it takes, and we know it will take the oblique form of juvenile delinquency. Indeed, it is the parents in these and innumerable other cases that are to blame, and I expect a law will soon be passed making the parent guilty of contributory delinquency in very many of these cases, and they will then be subject to fine or imprisonment or both, because *they* are in great measure to blame and not the child, for its anti-social outbreaks. If such a law is passed the parents will sit up and take notice in what their duties and responsibilities to their children consist, and this amendment to the child welfare laws will in time result in making these parents real mothers and fathers, and not, as at present, merely parents in name.

On the other hand, if parents will fulfill their duties and obligations to their children in full measure, and size up to their parental responsibility, they may reasonably expect a favorable result in good children—the kind that honor, love, respect and obey. Such children are helpful and kind and they will cheerfully and lovingly respond to all kinds of household work, errand running and every other reasonable request that will be made upon them.

The action and conduct of parents to children and the reciprocal acts of children toward parents are interrelated and correlated,

and parents generally, who fulfill their duty to their children, find them responsive, appreciative, generous and dutiful, which is all that can be expected of them and is the full "quid pro quo."

I have met thousands of parents who hadn't the remotest idea of their duty to their children. They labor under the mistaken idea that the child owes all duty to them—the parents; that parental duty practically ends with birth. These parents, and there are legions of them, must be educated to the fact that the birth of a child means the *commencement* of a lifelong responsibility, to be lessened somewhat, perhaps, after marriage of the child, but that the child requires ever, counsel, advice, suggestions, loving admonition and sympathetic supervision.

I must leave this all-important subject to which, if I did full measure of duty, I would require hours and not minutes to dwell upon, and take up another subject of supreme importance in child caring, and affecting the relation of parent and child. As a result of both observation and experience I cannot help feeling that parents are culpably lax in failing to promptly send their children to the Sunday schools, the church and the synagogue.

In New York City alone it is said that upward of 200,000 Jewish children have not been religiously instructed, and I have no doubt that at least an equal number of Catholic and Protestant children are thus growing up in the Empire City, regardless of and in comparative ignorance of religious instruction. This cannot be viewed by us without deep concern and something ought to be done in concerted action of the three great creeds to compel parents to send their children to church and religious or Sunday school with the same regularity that they are compelled to attend public schools. Discussion at tomorrow afternoon's session of this subject would be most profitable and timely.

Another subject of great importance I will briefly advert to. I find that there are a vast number of children who suffer from various dental troubles, such as decayed or carious or impacted teeth and the like. The parents seem to be utterly ignorant of their condition and are surprised when, for the first time, they learn of it from the medical certificate of the physician attached to the children's clinic which gives them this information. The same may be said of numerous other physical child conditions, such as hypertrophied tonsils, adenoids, running ears, under-

weight, anaemia, pediculosis and the like; these conditions should not prevail and, in any event, parents should have known of these conditions just as well as they know the names of their children, and their failure to know these vital matters stamp them as improper guardians.

Time will not permit me to pursue these thoughts much longer. You magistrates and social workers, many of you experts in child study and child welfare, realize the importance of healthy, moral children. Parents ought to know, but, I am sorry to say, too often do not, and either through ignorance, indifference or for other reasons, neglect those measures of prevention that would result in good, healthy, normal children. If the precautions I have indicated were properly and promptly carried out, both bad conduct and disease would in great measure be averted; if parents would do the simple and obvious things parenthood demands the children of the land would be entirely different and better, and become, in due time, a superior citizenry, mentally, morally, physically and socially.

Many children, because of such parentage, never have enjoyed the sacred and confidential relation of child and parent, or its manifold blessings.

I have but passingly referred to parents who don't seem to know their own child or children. I cannot dwell upon their lack of intelligence today, but must content myself with this one thought, that the day must come, and it cannot come too soon, when parents will be compelled to be mentally examined in order that diagnosis in juvenile delinquency will become more easy of solution.

The generic type of parents fail to know that the child represents social, economic and material conditions; neither do they know that the child absorbs, like a sponge, its surroundings, and that the child is primarily and delightfully (?) irresponsible and decidedly unsocial or anti-social. I find a great and growing need for parenthood training, so that parenthood shall become more intelligent and more efficient.

Hence it is up to parents to do the big things their parenthood requires, and, indeed, demands. They must be instructed, if they do not know what is required of them. By doing what is right and proper for the child they will prevent, in very large

measure, juvenile delinquency. By giving due attention to the child physical, they are avoiding the chafings and irritations consequent upon physical disorders and diseases, as well as social maladjustments, and they will build or help to build for the future a stronger, better and finer citizenry, a citizenry that will have a proper self-respect, as well as a higher regard for their neighbors and the rights of others, a citizenry that will be *truly religious*, which spells for a broad, liberal and tolerant view of the rights of others; in other words, a bigger, truer, finer, happier, healthier and more productive type of American, who will command more than ever the respect of all the peoples of the earth.

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